

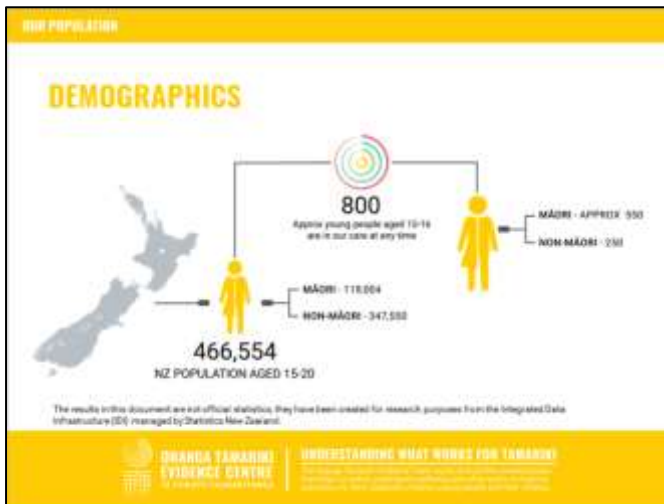
Mya Liston-Lloyd, Oranga Tamariki Evaluation of Transition from Care to Independence services

Presentation 1 February 2018.



Kia ora everyone, it's awesome to see so many people here; it's really heartening to know that this many people are interested in the work.

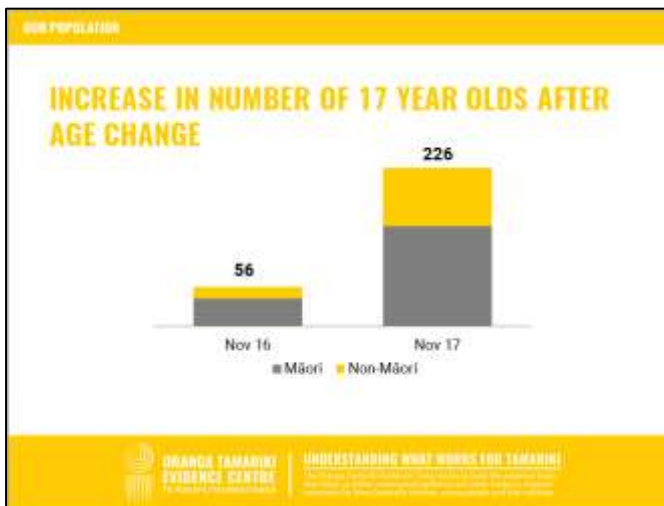
Last year I led an evaluation of the Transition from Care to Independence (TCI) service. This is delivered by two Auckland-based NGOs. So this TCI service is designed to support young people before, during and after their transition from being in our care to living independently in the community.



Before I get into the specifics around the evaluation and what we did and what we found, I thought it would be quite useful to give a little bit of context. **Who do we mean by "young people in care"** and why is this transition support so important?

The TCI service is aimed at young people aged between 15 and 20. Across the whole of New Zealand there are about 466,000 people within that group. Maori are about a quarter of that group; non-Maori, three-quarters. So at any one time about 800 of those young people who are aged 15 and

16 are in the statutory care of Oranga Tamariki. As you can see, Maori are quite over-represented in that population.



This graph shows the increase in the number of 17-year-olds who stayed in our care after a recent legislation change. In the past the age of statutory care was 17, so on a young person's 17th birthday, in most cases, they no longer remained in our care. But last year we changed the legislation to also enable young people to stay in our care up to their 18th birthday. And as you can see we had quite a shift in the number of young people choosing to take that option. We had quite a change in the dynamics of our care population. The 56 here relates to the small number of

young people who are under something called “additional guardianship orders”. That’s when the Ministry makes a commitment to provide ongoing financial support.

WHAT SORTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REFERRED TO TCI?

Young people who have a permanency goal of:
Achieving independence

Rather than....

- Living with a parent/guardian/person previously having care of them
- Living with family/whānau
- Living with non-family/whānau

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Who are the sorts of young people referred to the TCI service? We know that formally young people who are referred to the service need to have a permanency goal of achieving independence. That relates to an assessment a social worker has made about their living situation after they leave our care. Achieving independence means that the social worker has assessed that that young person isn’t able to live with a parent, guardian, or person who has previously had care of them. That they are not able to live with

their whānau, and they’re also not able to live with their non-whānau. So young people who are trying to make this transition, trying to shift towards living independently and they don’t have a strong network of support available.

WHAT SORTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REFERRED TO TCI?

Social workers will refer when....

- Inadequate whānau support/unstable living situation

Social workers will not refer if....

- Strong support network/highly functioning
- Alternative support available within health and disability system

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We also know that informally social workers consider some other criteria when making referral decisions. This relates to an idea that a young person has enough or too little support. We heard that sometimes social workers chose to refer people who have inadequate whānau support, unsafe or unstable living situation. So maybe the care and protection concerns that led to that young person coming into our care, they might be still manifest in that home environment.

We also heard that sometimes social workers chose not to refer a young person who might otherwise have been eligible and we discovered two core reasons why they make that decision.

In the first instance social workers told us that sometimes if a young person has a strong support network or is highly functioning they won’t refer them – this reflects an assumption from the social workers that the young person doesn’t need or wouldn’t benefit from the TCI support.

We also heard that sometimes social workers wouldn’t refer young people who could access specialist support within the health and disability system. So rather than receiving generic support through a TCI service they were able to access clinical support that perhaps better meets their needs.



So why is transition support so important? We know that every year there are a number of young people in our care, and those aged 17 and 18 have to make that shift to living independently. Why do we need to make sure they're so supported throughout this period? We know that transition support is important because historically its provision was quite limited. I couldn't resist including these two examples of past NZ research looking at transition support. To me these really demonstrate how abrupt the cut off was. We've got

"Happy birthday, goodbye", and *"Sink or swim"*. These are quite a powerful demonstration of the fact that prior to your 17th birthday you were in our care, and we were responsible for your day-to-day wellbeing. After that point there was a very real sense of quite an immediate discharge of caring responsibility.

So we also know that transition support is important because being a teenager is really hard. Moving to adulthood is hard for anyone, regardless of how much support they have, but it's especially hard for young people who've been in our care, who are recovering from trauma, who might need somewhere to live, who may not know how to cook, clean or pay rent. In some cases they might not even know how to read or write properly and these are young people who are trying to survive this time, trying to make this shift, and they're doing it all without a strong network of support.

We also know that transition support is important because young people who leave care often go on to experience poor long term outcomes in a variety of domains – that might be health, education, employment or offending.



So the EAP, the Expert Advisory Panel, report which was the genesis of Oranga Tamariki, highlighted a **need for improved transition support**.

Because of the sorts of reasons that we've just covered, transition support was identified as one of five major service areas within the new organisation, alongside prevention, early intervention, care and youth justice. As part of the EAP report they did an exercise to try and understand the voices and experiences of young people who'd been in our care. As part

of that they talked to some young people who were making that transition to try and understand to them what would a good transition system look like. So we heard that young people need a system that sets them up with the knowledge, skills and tools to flourish as an independent young adult. They also need that system to continue to be there for them as they find their way. So these are a really powerful demonstration of why transition support is so important.

So moving onto the **evaluation driver and intent** – what did we do and what were we hoping to achieve?



Overall, while the EAP report identified quite a limited provision of transition support, they did also identify these two existing TCI services as examples of good practice. The evaluation was a) an exercise in testing that claim, trying to understand the extent to which these services did actually demonstrate good practice, and b) also an exercise in simply trying to learn what we could from these existing services, trying to take as much insight from what's already been done and using all that

information to inform future service design.

So in terms of the specifics – what were the questions the evaluation was designed to answer?

- How the services were operating on the ground?
- What were key success factors and challenges?
- What were the experiences of young people, staff and social workers?



So what did we do? First off, we did two intervention logic models with both providers delivering the service. I won't cover them today but they are in the full report if anyone's interested.

We then used a qualitative methodology involving some semi-structured interviews. We talked to 15 young people. Eleven of those were still in the service, four of them had already left the service. We talked to 10 TCI staff members from both organisations involved in delivering the service. We talked to

six social workers who had referred young people to the programme. And we talked to two key stakeholders from within Oranga Tamariki, one from the Auckland regional office and one from national office.

We took all that information and we used it to write a formative evaluation report looking at aggregate findings. What I mean by aggregate findings is that we heard a lot of consistency from both providers around what the service did and how people experienced it, so we didn't consider it necessary to report on the two separately.

Evaluation findings: Because we have quite limited time today I thought it would be useful to focus on what we heard from young people about the service. What was their experience? What did they like? What did they think might be able to change?

EVALUATION FINDINGS

OVERALL, YOUNG PEOPLE WERE HIGHLY POSITIVE ABOUT THE TCI SERVICE

No [if I wouldn't change anything], this programme's pretty fun, eh. To be honest, everyone's really friendly here, easy to talk to.

The truth? [Without the TCI service] I think I'd either be dead or in prison.

I probably wouldn't be alive right now, to be honest, because when I came into [the service] I think that year I was really suicidal.

– comments from young people reflecting on their overall impression of TCI

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Overall we heard that **young people were highly positive about the service**. They told us that it was good, that they enjoyed it, that they wouldn't change anything and that it had a meaningful impact on their life. So these are some young comments from young people reflecting on their overall impression of TCI, and I think they're quite powerful.

So why did they like it so much? What was it about the service that meant they had such a positive impression? Essentially what this

boiled down to was relationships. At its heart **the TCI service is about forming strong, positive and supportive relationship** between a young person and the TCI worker that's assigned to them. And what we heard from young people was that it was this relationship-based support that was the most highly valued aspect of the programme. So young people told us that having a TCI worker was akin to having someone like a family member who was constantly available and who would do their best to help.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

YOUNG PEOPLE HIGHLY VALUED THE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THEIR TCI WORKER

Having someone akin to a family member, who is constantly available and who will do their best to help:

I don't have my family...I don't really have anyone to depend on or whatever, but they're constantly there and it's kind of like texting your mum for a ride, because that's kind of what they are.

Support that was unconditional, responsive and caring:

My case worker, she takes care of me like she's supposed to, like legally. But [my TCI worker] was more like a friend. She was actually like a friend to me, or like even more than a friend, like close to family-ish. Let me put it like that.

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This young person told us “you know, it's kind of like texting your mum for a ride”, because that's what they thought their TCI worker was to them. We also heard that young people perceived the support to be unconditional, responsive and caring. We also heard that young people characterised the support as quite different from what they might have received from their social worker.

This young person told us, “my case worker, my social worker, she takes care of me like she's

supposed to, like legally”. But in contrast to that they saw their TCI worker as being less constrained by the need to operate within that statutory environment. So consequently they perceived the support to be more like that of a friend or of a family member.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY TCI WORKERS

Being 'youth-led'; listening to them, being receptive to their needs, and letting them have a say.

Non-judgmental, patient, honest, positive, and chilled-out:
I wanted to work with someone who was honest and everything, because I can judge a person on their personality to see if I could fit with them, and [my TCI worker] was perfect for that.

He's not so uptight, I've met a lot of people that are uptight and [my TCI worker] was one of the first people that I've met that's like real, real chilled.

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So if relationships are so important, if that's such a highly valued aspect of the service, what makes a good TCI worker? **What are some characteristics of quality TCI workers?** Young people told us it was important that their TCI worker was youth-led and this was in a really genuine rather than tokenistic sense. So we heard TCI workers needed to be receptive to the needs of young people, they needed to listen to them and let them have a say. In terms of some more specific characteristics

of quality TCI workers, some young people told us it was important they were non-judgemental, patient, honest, positive and chilled out. So this young person says, "you know, I need my TCI worker to be honest and a good fit", and this young person says, "rather than being uptight, I need my TCI worker to be quite relaxed and chilled out".

EVALUATION FINDINGS

YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICULARLY VALUED SOME OTHER ASPECTS OF THE TCI SERVICE

- Support with **practical goal setting** and attainment, particularly getting a drivers license.
- Support in **crisis situations**, including when young people have nowhere to live or nothing to eat.
- The **long duration** of the service, and the ability to **disengage and re-engage**.
- The opportunity to engage in **activities with other care experienced young people**.

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So beyond that relationship-based support, what were some other things we heard from young people about what they valued about the service? We heard that **young people valued support with practical goal setting** and attainment and they particularly identified support getting their driver's licence as a key component of that. We heard from young people that these were core foundational skills that provided a basis for them to move towards being independent.

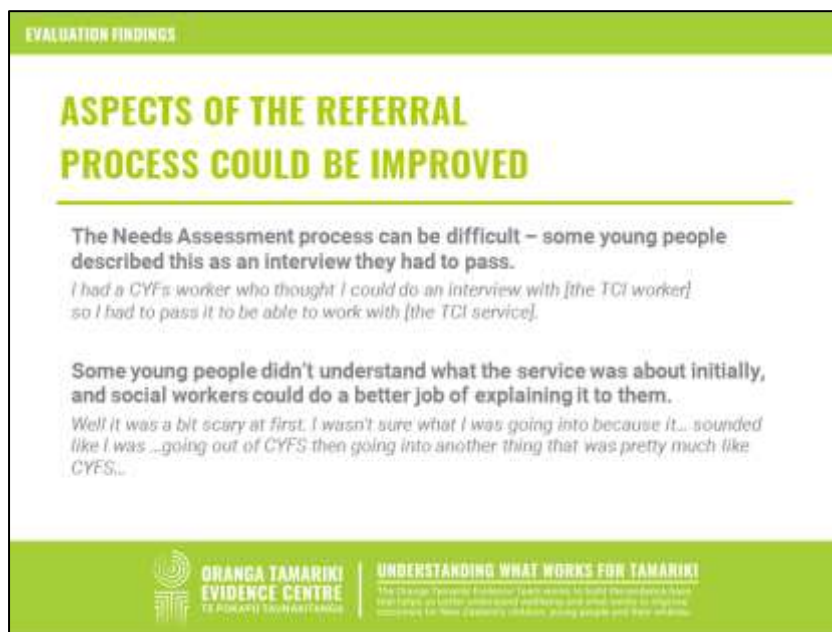
We also heard that young people really valued support in a crisis situation. The TCI service isn't designed to provide emergency support, but what we heard from the TCI workers was that when these instances happened, they felt they had no choice but to step up and provide that support. These were instances where young people might have nowhere to live or nothing to eat.

We also heard that young people really valued the long duration of the service. In some instances the service can go from 15 to 20 – that's quite a considerable amount of time. Young people told us this long duration provided a real sense of reassurance and consistence and that was really highly valued.

The TCI service is also voluntary and that means the young people have the ability to disengage and re-engage at any time, and young people told us they took up this opportunity on quite a regular basis.

And they saw this as something that simply reflected changes in their life circumstances. For example, if they moved out of the Auckland region. But again they acknowledged that knowing the TCI service was there to come back to was something that was reassuring for them.

So finally we heard from young people that they really valued the opportunity to engage in activities with other care-experienced young people. Young people told us meeting and hanging out with young people with similar life experiences was really therapeutic to them, but it also helped them meet new friends and build up new networks of support.



So while overall we heard that young people highly valued the service we also heard that **there were some things that they thought could be improved** and a couple of these referred particularly to the referral process. As part of the referral process the TCI worker undertakes a needs assessment, and young people told us that process could sometimes be a little bit challenging. A couple of people hold us that they perceived this to be an

interview that they had to “pass” in order to work with the service.

We also heard that sometime young people didn't really understand what the service was about at first and this had some implications for their willingness to engage. For example, this young person said, “it was a bit scary, I didn't really understand what I was going into”. They told us their social worker could do a better job of explaining it to them.

So beyond the referral process, what were some other things we heard that could potentially change or improve in the service? The TCI service can't continue to support young people forever. At some point sources of support in the community need to step in and provide this. But what we heard from young people was that this wasn't necessarily happening to a large degree and they felt there could be a strengthened focus on building those supportive relationships.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, given that the service operates out of Auckland, we also heard that finding youth-focussed housing was really hard. So this isn't just access to housing full stop. This is making sure that when young people are in housing it's appropriate and it suits their needs.

So finally we heard that perhaps there was need for increased flexibility around the age of discharge from the service. As I said, the TCI service goes up to the age of 20, but when we talked to young people who had exited they told us that they didn't always feel ready to live entirely independently at that point and they did value the opportunity to access some ongoing support. Young people cited 24 or 25 as potentially a better age of exit.

CONCLUSION

OVERALL JUDGMENT

- Overall, feedback highlighted a perception that existing TCI services are generally well-functioning and effective
- Findings from this evaluation suggest that these services have the potential to inform a national transition support model
- Evaluation included several recommendations for service design

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We talked to a range of stakeholders and the feedback that we heard highlighted a perception that these existing TCI services were generally considered to be well-functioning and effective. On that basis, our overall finding or evaluative judgement was that **these services have the potential to inform a national transition support model**. That's not to say that we should just roll out the TCI service full stop – but that there are aspects of the service that we can draw

from.

To assist that process, the evaluation also included a series of recommendations to inform that service design, including things around the referral process, the contracting, some of the resourcing. Again if you are interested they are included in the full report.

CONCLUSION

NEXT STEPS FOR ORANGA TAMARIKI TRANSITION SUPPORT

Transition support part of the first tranche of change

Legislation changes relating to transition support have been passed:

- remain living with caregiver until 21
- remain in contact until 21
- access transition support to 25

On-going transition service design using a human-centred design approach

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Finally, where to now for Oranga Tamariki transition support? The introduction of these services was part of the first tranche of change following the establishment of Oranga Tamariki. Last year, alongside the statutory age change that I've already mentioned, we passed a range of legislation relating to transition support. Young people now have the right to remain living with their caregiver till age 21, to remain in contact till 21 and to access transition support

till age 25. While that legislation has been passed, it doesn't come into effect until July next year, so currently the transition service design team within Oranga Tamariki are busy trying to design a range of services and supports to respond to that legislation change. They're taking a human-centred design approach, and alongside the findings of this evaluation they're talking to a range of stakeholders and gathering quite a comprehensive amount of information to inform that design work.

Thank you for listening. Here's my email [mya.listonlloyd@mvcot.govt.nz] and a link to the final report

<https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/news/from-care-to-independence-report/>